

## ***Distance Education in the Seychelles: Future Directions***

**Dr. David Murphy**

Centre for Higher Education Development  
Monash University  
(formerly with the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong)

**Professor Rob Walker**

Centre for Education and Change  
Deakin University

February 1998

### **Overview**

This report comprises the outcomes of a visit to the Seychelles by the consultants with a view to recommending a possible model of distance education provision for the Republic. It has been our firm view that for any such model to succeed, it must be developed in concert with those who will be required to put it into operation. Hence, what is presented here should be understood as the product of a strongly consultative approach to the task.

A number of key issues are seen as vital to successfully implementing a model of distance education. First is the matter of *ownership*. Programmes offered by distance education have been available (usually successfully) from time to time in the Seychelles, but the concept has never really taken root, largely because ownership has always rested with the overseas host institution. A condition for distance education to become an integral part of the Seychelles education system is that at least part of the system of distance education should be "owned" locally.

The second issue relates to the nature of the proposed model of distance education provision, which we believe should be *evolutionary*. That is, distance education should evolve from what is now essentially a model of overseas provision through to a model of adaptation of overseas courses that involves local student support and assessment. The evolution should take advantage of concurrent staff development in distance education and inevitable increasing access to computer and communication technologies.

Thirdly, the model of distance education development should be *flexible*. That is, while it is possible to currently identify particular areas of need, new opportunities and demands for courses will arise, to which a flexible system of provision should be ready to respond.

Overall, the model thus proposes that a small Centre of Distance Education be set up within the School of Education and Community Studies of the Seychelles Polytechnic, and that this Centre be responsible for offering, in the first instance, a Diploma in Early Childhood Education for a targeted group of in-service teachers. Subsequent programmes will build on this experience, with the strong possibility that as the Centre grows and evolves, it will become a separate entity within the Seychelles Polytechnic. Through the flexible provision of courses, it will become the hub of distance education provision, offering adapted courses and acting as the local centre for courses offered by overseas providers.

### **Summary**

The essential argument presented by this report is that the demographics of the Seychelles do not support the development of a major distance education infrastructure. Rather, the model of provision that is recommended is one of evolutionary growth that results in flexible use of adjusted or adapted overseas materials.

In order for this to become a reality, the following recommendations are made:

1. Effective use of distance programmes in the Seychelles requires the establishment of a Distance Education Centre, which should be set up with the assistance of COL. This can be small in the first instance but should be capable of development as the use of distance education expands. The role of the DE Centre should be to manage distance education programmes, to evaluate programmes, to provide staff development and to act as a source of advice to other agencies, public and private.
2. Funds should be sought to support the appointment of a distance education consultant to establish the Distance Education Centre and to assist in the adoption and adaptation of the Early Childhood Education Diploma course.
3. In-service education has proved to be a good place to begin the development of distance programmes in other countries but expansion into other areas should be encouraged. Nursing may be a second area to develop (clear interest has been expressed), management education, agriculture and construction may also be possible areas. Clearly this has implications for collaboration and co-operation between various Ministries and the Polytechnic.
4. Student support should be built in to proposed developments. Students will need to learn how to use distance programmes to greatest effect and this may take some time to establish.
5. Teachers engaged in distance programmes will need access to staff development but this should be seen in the context of an overall staff development programme, not in isolation from it. Input to the programme should be obtained from COL.
6. The establishment of improved computing facilities and Internet access is vital and urgent for staff who will be working in distance programmes, since so many resources are moving to the Internet worldwide and communication with the distance education community is increasingly computer based. Again, COL support is recommended.
7. In the long term, student access to computer based communications needs to be a priority.
8. The Polytechnic library will need an injection of funds to extend its collection and to purchase multiple copies of books that may be in heavy demand.
9. Resource collections should also be established locally (perhaps in schools) and/or an effective book ordering and distribution system for a central sources should be established.